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SUBJECT: ECOWAS ON GUINEA

REF: ABUJA 644

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Heather C. Merritt for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

1. (C) The recently concluded meetings between ECOWAS and the EU troika in Vienna included significant discussion about the coming political transition in Guinea. The EU expressed concern about civil society's preparation for transition, thinking that without organized civilian structures, there would be no one to politically oppose a military takeover. The EU proposed a three-pronged approach to engagement with Guinea's civil society--ECOWAS, the EU, and the UN (represented at the talks by Ould Abdullah). Once all three of these "prongs" have launched their programs, they plan to meet to evaluate their efforts and to then concentrate their engagement on successful strategies.

2. (C) The Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defense, and Security (DES-PADS), Colonel Mahamane Toure, told PolMilOff that ECOWAS is also concerned about engagement with the military in advance of Conte's death. Toure pointed to efforts being made by ACSS to engage the military and said that ECOWAS wants to be involved in all of these programs to put an ECOWAS (as opposed to strictly US) face on this engagement. Toure said that engagement with Guinea's armed forces on the proper role of a military in democratic society was a particular priority of Dr. Chambas, the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS.

3. (C) Comment: Concerns over a post-Conte Guinea have often been voiced privately within the halls of ECOWAS for years. Over the last two months, however, these concerns have risen to prominence in ECOWAS' engagement with its partners. ECOWAS, perhaps emboldened by its perceived political successes of the last year (Togo, Guinea Bissau, Liberia), has taken a more proactive posture toward Guinea (and also toward Nigeria) in the last couple of weeks. Many in ECOWAS feel that West Africa has turned to corner on conflict and begin to focus on development and economic integration. Their fear, however, is that civil conflict in Guinea could disrupt the subregion on a scale unmatched by the previous conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Cote d'Ivoire. End Comment.
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